e-EduTour: The Digital International Student Mobility Project

Nur Khairunnisa Padail[1], Zulaica W.L. Wee[2], Esther H.S Wong[3], Marcella Wee Wilbur[4], and Souba Rethinasamy[5]*

[1-5] Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

nurkhairunnisapadail@gmail.com, zulaica0728@gmail.com, ewhs20@gmail.com, marcellaweewilbur@gmail.com, and *rsouba@unimas.my

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: International student mobility programs play an important role in fostering a holistic development of university students. In an effort to ensure its continuity despite the travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a team of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) undergraduates embarked on an initiative to create a digital version of student mobility with the guidance from their supervisor. The project named e-EduTour includes introduction to UNIMAS campus, tour of tourist attractions, taste of local food, exposure to local culture, and English language lessons. The project was successfully commercialized to Japanese partner university students. This paper provides an illustrative case study of the journey undertaken by the host university undergraduates in creating the e-EduTour, examine the foreign participants' views about the e-EduTour's components and university student buddies' opinion about their experience. The data gathered via questionnaire from the Japanese participants showed that they view the e-EduTour content as very good and especially value the support given by the student buddies. The data gather from reflections of the UNIMAS team show that working on the e-EduTour project provided an opportunity for them to apply knowledge learnt in classroom to solve a real-life problem by collaborating with peers from various disciplines of study, learn through experience in a fun and exciting way, form friendship with foreign students, as well as foster personal growth. The findings clearly indicate that the digital version of short-term student mobility is possible and could enrich both the host buddies as well as the foreign participants' learning, despite the physical distance.

Keywords: Internationalization; Student mobility; Short-term study tours; Digital student mobility; e-EduTour

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, in line with the rapid advance in globalisation, institutions of higher learning are constantly looking into ways to enhance their graduates' cultural awareness and best prepare them to become global citizens. One such effort is internationalisation of higher education which involves offering international programs and students going to a partner university abroad. This can can take diverse forms such as undertaking cultural exchange, community projects, language learning, academic study, study tours, and internships [1]. Over the years short-term mobility ranging from 1 to 8 weeks have become popular [2]. Researchers have highlighted many benefits of participating in short-term mobility programmes which include cultural, language, personal and employment [3-6].

While the multiple benefits of student mobility are undisputed [7], it is certainly not accessible to many students due to equity issues such as high cost and immigration matters [8]. In addition, the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic brought about severe disruptions to the implementation of short-term mobility programmes around the globe [9]. Some instions have attempted to design virtual student mobility [7&10]. Due to its newness, the literature on the detailed development of such program is scare. Moreover, there has been no study reporting the effects and evaluation of virtual student mobility programs.

To address this gap, the present study aims to provide a detailed description of a digitalized international student mobility program, examine the international participants' views about the content and the views of host university student buddies' on how their participation has affected them.